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SOUTH AFRICA

Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke
van die Kaap, Natal en Transvaal

Dutch Reformed Church
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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THE REPUBLIC

The first President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. C. R. Swart, was inducted at a solemn ceremony in the Pretoria Central Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk) on 31st May.

The short ceremony in the church consisted of communal singing, prayer, scripture reading, a choral performance, and the taking and signing of the official oath. The proceedings were conducted in both official languages, and an Afrikaans and an English minister officiated.

The new President, who was also the last Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, is a devoted member of the church (see Newsletter No. 25). The Opposition candidate for the presidency, Mr. H. A. Fagan, was a student at the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch in 1910.

An Afrikaans cultural organisation asked churches to mark the coming of the republic with midnight services. The federal council and synods of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerke decided, however, to leave such arrangements to the discretion of individual parish councils. Congregations were asked to observe the Sundays before and after 31st May as days of prayer and dedication for the future of the country and the tasks that lay ahead. Similar requests were made by several other denominations.

The preamble to the Constitution Act reads: "In humble submission to Almighty God, Who controls the destinies of nations and forges the history of all peoples, Who gathered us together from many lands and gave us this our own, Who has guided us generation after generation, Who has wondrously delivered us from the dangers that beset us; conscious of our responsibility towards God and man; convinced of the necessity to foster the growth of a unified nation, to safeguard the integrity and freedom of our country, to secure the maintenance of law and order, to further the contentment of our people and their spiritual and material welfare; accepting our duty to seek world peace in association with the other peace-loving nations of the world; praying that the Republic will strenghten unity among our people and further the development and advancement of our land; charged with the task of founding the Republic of South Africa and giving it a Constitution best suited to the traditions of our land; the Queen, the Senate and the House of Assembly of the Union of South Africa enact as follows . . . "

THE KEY IS LOVE

It must be remembered in dealing with the racial problem that "we are dealing with people — and the key to the heart of people is love", said the moderator, the Rev. A. M. Meiring, when he opened the meeting of the Transvaal General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk.

Mr. Meiring said that the non-whites expected five things from the church: leadership, consultation, responsibility, practical help, and — most of all — love. "We should take these words to heart," he said. "Love bridges so many things. Love takes account of sicknesses, worries and domestic needs of the other man. Love seeks the best, even in provocative circumstances. Love does not speak from a height, but is willing to listen."

"How far have we progressed in this?" Mr. Meiring asked. "Let everyone give the answer to himself and, if need be, with humility. We live in a country where rapid social changes take place, shaking the Bantu to his foundations. We must look around us and see what there is to be done — and do it quickly. The future is unpredictable, fraught with many dangers. But if we stand by the Word of God, our perplexity will turn to opportunity."

Christianity was becoming more and more to the non-white a symbol of everything that was white. Black nationalism made the non-whites intolerant to white supremacy and to the expansion of the Christian church among their own people. Paganism, so long the enemy of the missionary, was reviving. The Moslem religion, for many years disregarded as a threat to Christianity, had offered itself as champion for the black man. In view of these dangers it was the duty of the church to intensify its missionary endeavour.

WHITSUNTIDE CENTENARY

The centenary of Whitsuntide prayer meetings was celebrated in all congregations of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa from 11th to 21st May.

As far as we know, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk is the only church in the world which holds daily prayer meetings during the ten days from Ascension Day to Whitsunday. This custom dates from 1861 and has been observed in all congregations of the church ever since.

It was inspired by the religious revival which swept the world a hundred years ago. At a recent inter-church conference, the Rev. Dr. W. Nicol gave the following description of what happened in South Africa at the time: "It started in the Western Province and gradually spread along the south-west coastline, penetrated the Karoo and even made itself felt in the distant republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. The annual reports of congregations during that period make fascinating reading. Old feuds were settled in the Spirit of Christ, prescribed debts were paid, the Gospel was brought to all, drinking-houses were deserted and places of worship crowded. Pious ministers, missionaries and teachers were imported from Scotland, Holland and Switzerland and religious life was stimulated in every way."

The daily prayer meetings were started by the Rev. G. W. A. van der Lingen, of the Paarl congregation, and soon caught on elsewhere. From 1867 subjects for discussion at such meetings were published in the official organ of the church. On Whitsunday joint rallies are usually held in the larger towns.

IN BRIEF

● "Religious freedom is practised in South Africa and there is no danger that this freedom will be affected," says a statement by the Deputy Minister of the Interior. "No existing church or mosque will be affected by the application of the Group Areas Act. As has been the case in the past, people will still be free to worship in their churches or mosques without hindrance."

● A sixth professor will be appointed at the Theological Faculty of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk at the University of Pretoria. This step has been made possible by the zeal of the Rev. P. J. Swart, who collected more than R54,000 (£27,000) for the Theological Faculty Fund during the past two years. When the faculty was established 25 years ago, Mr. Swart collected about R60,000 (£30,000) for the same purpose.

● The Transvaal General Synod has voted R24,000 (£12,000) for the education of Afrikaans-speaking children in Kenya. An additional amount of R20,000 (£10,000) per annum has been voted for the theological schools for non-whites in South Africa.

● The Rev. A. M. Meiring has been re-elected as moderator of the Transvaal General Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk. The other members of the moderamen (executive committee) are the Rev. A. J. V. Burger, the Rev. J. M. Benade, and the Rev. Dr. W. D. Jonker.

● The Rev. H. J. C. Snijders has been re-elected as moderator of the Natal Synod. His fellow members of the moderamen (executive committee) are the Rev. J. Adler, the Rev. H. D. du Toit and the Rev. J. C. Jansen.

● Regret at arrangements which had brought the Springbok rugby team back to South Africa on a Sunday was expressed by the Federal Council for the Combating of Social Evils. The council appreciated the attitude adopted by the Rugby Board in the past in respect of rugby matches on Sundays, and hoped that in the arrangement of future tours Sunday would be respected as the Day of the Lord in all respects.

● The Federal Council for the Combating of Social Evils was not interested in political censorship, except perhaps in the censorship of books that promoted Communism — and that should be handled under the Supression of Communism Act — said the Rev. D. F. B. de Beer, secretary of the council, in a press interview. The church felt, however, that steps should be taken by the state to suppress and restrict literature of an immoral or blasphemous nature.

● Miss E. J. von Mollendorf, of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk mission in Bechuanaland, has been awarded a bronze medal and life membership of the Royal African Society for dedicated service to Africa. In addition to her work at the Mochudi Homecrafts Centre she is the district Girl Guide commissioner and has considerable influence among the non-white women in the protectorate.

● The Transvaal General Synod has rejected the views expressed in the book "Delayed Action" in so far as such views conflict with clear policy statements of the church. The synod stated that it did not wish to hamper study and exchange of views on the academic level, but asked members to consider the possible repercussions before publishing controversial material.

● The new chapel of the theological school for non-whites at Turfloop, in the Northern Transvaal, was opened during a conference attended by 125 non-white pastors and evangelists. The same day the Rev. M. J. D. Jacobsohn was inducted as the first full-time mission campaign organiser of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of the Transvaal.

● The campaign for the R6,000,000 (£3,000,000) Christian Literature Fund for the non-whites of Africa has now been extended to the Cape Province and Northern and Southern Rhodesia. The Rev. G. H. Oosthuizen, mission secretary in Natal, has been appointed as chief organiser of the fund in succession to the Rev. Dr. A. M. Dekker.

● The members of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Natal contributed R116,374 (£58,187) last year for missionary work among the non-whites. This represents an average contribution of R4.65 (£2/6/6) per member. The contributions for missionary work in that province were doubled during the last three years.

● The Bothashof children's home and school near Salisbury, in Southern Rhodesia, celebrated its golden jubilee in April. The institution was established as a church orphanage in Bulawayo in 1911 and was later transferred to Daisyfield, from where it was moved to Salisbury some years ago.

● Professor D. J. Keet, retired professor of the history of Christianity at the Theological Faculty of the Pretoria University, died on 20th April. The late Dr. Keet was pastor of the Pretoria East congregation until his appointment to the university staff when the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk established the Theological Faculty in 1938. After his retirement in 1953 he became archivist of the church in the Transvaal.

● Dr. Danie Craven, chairman of the South African Rugby Board, has appealed to South African rugby players to apply Christian principles to the national game. He pleaded with them to keep the game clean. Speaking at St. Helena, Dr. Craven said a man could only be a good sportsman and "play the game" throughout life if he were a good Christian.

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